

# The Frequency of First Cousin Marriages in a South Swedish Rural Community

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ALL MARRIAGES, contracted in the South Swedish community of G-B during the years 1901–1952, have been examined genealogically in order to determine the rate of first cousin marriages. This community was selected at random among 212 rural communities in the southernmost and most densely populated county of Sweden (Malmöhus län). The community happened to be situated in a district that was, in 1930, intermediate with regard to the percentage of residents born within the community, and in this respect representative of about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the area of a larger region studied by Bergsten (1951), comprising 78 per cent of the Swedish population (Svealand, excepting Dalarna, and Götaland).

The community was, within an area of 55 sq. km. of dry land, inhabited by 2,228 people in 1901 and 1,187 in 1952 (Table 1). Gains or losses through migration are presented in Table 1. G-B is an agricultural community without industry except a tilery, built in 1884 and employing, in 1952, 42 workmen. G-B has a highway, several byways and, since 1874 and 1884, respectively, two railways.

Data for the investigation were secured through marriage records, parish registers, and birth records. Of 576 marriages between 569 men and 574 women 10, or 1.7 per cent, were between first cousins. In the period 1901–1913 the rate of first cousin marriages was 4/162, 1914–1926 it was 3/163, 1927–1939 the rate was 3/148, and in 1940–1952 none of the 103 marriages embodied first cousins.

These figures make for the minimum incidence of first cousin marriages in G-B. The 10 first cousin marriages occurred among 457 couples with ancestries ascertainable in sufficient detail to determine if the partners were in fact first cousins. The maximum incidence of observed first cousin marriages in the community under study was, then, 2.2 per cent. If 119 marriages are considered half-examined, the frequency of first cousin marriages contracted in G-B 1901–1952 can be estimated to be 1.9 per cent.

## DISCUSSION

This incidence of first cousin marriages agrees with observations from rural areas in Götaland by Larsson and Sjögren (1954) and Svealand by Böök and Måwe (1955). Larsson and Sjögren observed an incidence of first cousin marriages of  $2.6 \pm 0.6$  per cent for the native population and  $2.3 \pm 0.5$  per cent for the resident popula-

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Aided by a grant to the Institute of Genetics from the Rockefeller Foundation and by a personal grant from the Royal Physiographic Society.

Received March 12, 1956.

TABLE 1. POPULATION AND MIGRATION LOSSES OF G-B DURING THE PERIOD OF OBSERVATION, CALCULATED AS DIFFERENCES BETWEEN IN-MIGRATIONS AND OUT-MIGRATIONS

Period	Annual averages and standard errors		
	Population	Migration losses	
		Number	Per thousand of population
1901-1913	2,116 $\pm$ 16	23 $\pm$ 11	11 $\pm$ 5
1914-1926	1,991 $\pm$ 7	27 $\pm$ 8	13 $\pm$ 4
1927-1939	1,749 $\pm$ 31	35 $\pm$ 6	20 $\pm$ 3
1940-1952	1,344 $\pm$ 37	36 $\pm$ 6	26 $\pm$ 4

tion in the west coast district of AB:bo 1861-1920. Bökk and Måwe studied a community on the Norwegian frontier and observed 7/570 first cousin marriages in 1925 and 7/535 in 1954, i.e. 1.2 and 1.3 per cent, respectively.

In both these studies, as in the present one, genealogic data were ascertained through official records. Larsson and Sjögren used as index cases parents of children born in AB:bo; Bökk and Måwe investigated by census method existing marriages with both partners resident in Östmark; the present study concerned the marriages actually contracted in G-B. These different approaches, motivated by slightly differing aspects of the general problem, need impair neither the comparableness of the results nor their usefulness as preliminary estimates of first cousin marriage rates in wider rural areas.

The risks immanent in extrapolations to larger regions of kin mating rates observed in small districts could possibly be reduced by paying attention to substantial differences in the mobility of the populations in different regions. In his study of South Swedish birth-place fields, based on census figures of 1930, Bergsten (1951) observed that a broad region, including West Sweden and the county of Blekinge, was characterized by a tendency for people to remain in their birth community. A mainly East Swedish region was notable for a more mobile population and one zone, between this region and the Western one, was intermediary, as was the district where G-B is situated. Considering the influence of the community area on the percentage of residents born within the community, Bergsten observed, in that Western region of relatively stable population, a series of rural districts with decreasing excess of native residents. The district examined by Larsson and Sjögren was at the higher extreme of that series, the community of Bökk and Måwe's investigation at the lower one. Actually one motive for Larsson and Sjögren's choice of this district for their investigation was that the annual influx of new residents was the lowest for any district in Sweden.

The rates of cousin marriages obtained by Bökk and Måwe in a community they regarded as a geographic isolate, and by me in a community that was not such, were calculated on small numbers of positive observations and admit of no far-reaching conclusions as to the general frequency of first cousin marriages in rural Sweden. Extrapolations to the East Swedish belt of mobile population would perhaps be especially misleading; factors, limited to agricultural districts, and more potent than

differences in population mobility, might be responsible for the relatively high incidence of first cousin marriages in G-B. While an increased migration decreases the kin mating rate, as Larsson and Sjögren pointed out with regard to their observations, the present findings from a somewhat later period might evoke the question whether the decrease has really been rapid and substantial.

## SUMMARY

In a South Swedish agricultural community with a decreasing, moderately mobile population, at least 10 (1.7 per cent) of 574 resident women married their first cousins during 1901-1952.

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